

BISHOPS' THRONES AND EARLY CHURCHES.

Your correspondent, "S." at page 94, states that the *communion-table* lies with me in respect to the position I have assumed, that the *chancel* in primitive churches was a mere platform, with no other screen than a low railing for safety; and that on this platform, or "*chancel*," the communion-table was never placed.

In your pages I can only expect space for a brief outline of a subject which requires volumes to do it justice.

In the first place, I claim the whole Scriptures, every page and line in them, as being on my side in this question; secondly, every church, if in its original state, erected during the first three or four centuries, and I think I may venture even so far as the seventh; thirdly, the testimony of Justin Martyr, of Jerome, and others among the fathers; fourthly, the Reformers; and fifthly, Cardinal Wiseman, who will doubtless be somewhat astonished to find himself placed in such good company.

The Scriptures prove that under the old dispensation the people were not admitted into the temple, that privilege being restricted to the priests, and the high-priest alone was permitted once only in the year to enter the holy of holies; all this being typical of the fact that the race of man was, by the fall, excluded from the presence of the true Holy of Holies—*God*. To keep alive the memory of God's promise that in due time his only Son would come to save those whom he had created, the typical sacrifices of bulls and goats were made on the altar by the priests for the people.

When the "Great High Priest" had completed the *one great and only real sacrifice*, which was to be offered "*once only and for ever*," when he had uttered the words "*it is finished*," the thick veil which screened the holy of holies in the temple was "*torn in twain*," the intervention of human priests between man and God was abolished, and from that moment every Christian, the humblest and the poorest, in the words of St. Peter, became a partaker in the heavenly calling, a king and priest unto God, privileged through faith in the great atoning sacrifice, to address his prayers and praises direct to the "*Holy of Holies*," and to offer to Him that only sacrifice he would henceforth receive of man—"a broken and contrite heart."

The Jewish temple was a most important commentary on the Jewish religion, and the primitive churches afford a commentary, not less instructive as to the manner in which the first Christians—they, be it remembered, with whom temple rites and arrangements constituted an integral part of religion—understood Christianity.

As all were henceforth brethren, all equal as Christians, whether prince or peasant, rich or poor, before their common Father, the worship rendered to him, in the most striking contrast to all previous notions on this subject, would henceforth be a social worship; at least so the apostles and their followers understood it, for they met at first in the upper room at Jerusalem, the real mother church therefore, and subsequently in the houses of those converts whose mansions possessed rooms sufficiently large to accommodate their brethren: at Philippi, Aquilla and Priscilla enjoyed this honour; at Jerusalem, James and Mary provided the requisite accommodation: Nymphæ's house was in use at Colossæ; and we also read of Philemon's residence being so employed.

"The church which is in every house," implied that each Christian family with its natural head was a true church. The broader scriptural definition is, "a congregation of faithful men;" that is to say, the aggregated families, who elected one of the brethren to preside over them, and gave him the endearing name of father; his technical appellation being that of the elder, bishop, or overseer, or president, as he was often called.

In the mansions of the Greek and Roman nobility, they had a room set apart in which their families and dependants assembled, and in which the head of the house, on a raised platform at one end, having a slight rail in front of it, sat to decide disputes. This room was the original of the Greek and Roman

Basileus, or halls of justice, in which precisely the same arrangement prevailed, only these being often of much larger size, had rows of columns to support the roof, thus dividing the building into nave, side-aisles, and clerestory—a constructive arrangement common to Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, and owing its origin to their inability to roof over such wide spans without these intervening supports.

When the Christians were able to construct churches, although the dismantled temples were placed at their disposal, these were rejected; and I challenge Cardinal Wiseman to produce his instances of any being adapted, as he says they were, to Christian purposes, before the conversion of the Pantheon, once dedicated to Minerva and all the gods, into a church, by Pope Boniface the Fourth, who rededicated it to the Virgin Mary and all the saints. The temple model even was repudiated, and the Christians followed, with the most absolute literalness, the arrangement of the halls of justice, placing their president on a similar platform to that which the Roman official president occupied, and continuing to call this platform by the same name of cancelli, a name perpetuated to this day, all through Europe, in the term "*chancellor*"—a title by a natural figure of speech derived from the raised platform on which the president sat. In adopting this model, this open hall, the Christians were following, in the most literal manner, the precedent set by the apostles and disciples, who met in the upper room at Jerusalem; indeed, in all probability, the rooms set apart in the houses of the more wealthy of the faithful as the common meeting rooms, (for that is the English meaning of conventicle, that word and the term convent both owing their origin to *conveneri*, the meeting house) were the tribunal halls. As no one with any regard for his reputation will venture to dispute the well-known fact of the literal copy of the Basilica in the first erected churches of which we have any definite description or remains to judge from, the point is proved that for the first three or four centuries the practice of the Christian was uniform in considering that a simple room, in which no other division existed between any of the brethren than that necessary one of a raised platform for the president and his associate officers, was the proper place in which Christian brethren should meet for Christian worship.

That no new part in this room was considered more sacred than another, is a point equally capable of demonstration.

When St. Paul reproves the Corinthians for their improper manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper, his rebuke is not against their practice of partaking of it as a meal, but at their sensuality in gratifying their bodily hunger and thirst at this solemn commemorative feast: this passage of St. Paul proves that the Christians then celebrated the Supper precisely as it had been first instituted, all sitting round the table, and Justin Martyr gives similar evidence as to the practice in his day. "On Sunday we all assemble in one place," "both those who live in the city and those who dwell in the country, and the writings of apostles and prophets are read so long as the time permits. When the reader stops, the president of the assembly makes an address, in which he recapitulates the glorious things that have been read, and exhorts the people to follow them. Then we all stand up together and pray. After prayer, bread, wine, and water are brought in. The president of the assembly again prays, according to his ability, and gives thanks, to which the people respond Amen."—Apol. 1, c. 61—67.

Tertullian gives similar evidence, and Justin Martyr, in another part of his work, mentions that on these occasions the president presided, sitting, of course, at the head of the table. It is clear, from these passages, that a solemn social meal was taken by all in the church, and that this love-feast was originally part of the ceremony used in commemorating the Lord's Supper. The employment of the term "*table*," is another evidence of this fact, and in the church of St. John Lateran, at Rome, they

show you a wooden table, which is vouched to be the actual one used by St. Peter.

For the fact, that the communion-table was not placed in the chancel or platform, we have, then, the evidence of St. Paul, who proves incidentally, that the disciples sat or reclined around the table, and Justin Martyr's description goes to the same fact, while the form, arrangement, and use of the primitive churches, show that the table could not have been on this platform, inasmuch as there was not room there for the people to sit around any table so placed, and which, if so placed, would have been in the way of the bishop, whose seat was always at the extreme end of the room; and from this seat, until the days of Chrysostom, of whom it is recorded that he changed the practice, the president preached.

Cardinal Wiseman, in his recent installation discourse, mentions this ancient position of the bishop's seat at the extreme end of the church, and all the ancient churches prove this, and at the same time prove that there could therefore have been no intervening screen or table on the platform between the president and the congregation, who, had this been the case, would have been precluded from hearing or seeing him; and we may be equally certain that there was no screen round the table, because, as it must have stood among the people, the officiating ministers, who were seated at the extreme end of the church, would have been the parties excluded; and we know that when they ultimately usurped the rights of the people, it was these latter who were screened off from that table at which their forefathers had sat in equality.

The cardinal, in his installation address, mentions the fact, that a marble seat had been discovered in a church in the catacombs. Some of these catacombs were old stone quarries, and there is no doubt such an uncomfortable, lumbago-giving material for a seat was chosen from a motive analogous to that which dictated the choice of materials for the palace of the King of the Canaan Islands, *where*

"Was built of mud for want of bricks."

And the seat, for a reason equally good, was made of stone for want of wood; but this common sense view does not suit the cardinal, and he says "that as the stability of that seat might denote the permanence of that succession that was to ensue therein;" forgetting, I presume, when he uttered these words, that he had written a book to prove that the wooden throne, as he calls it, preserved at Rome, is the undoubted original on which St. Peter undoubtedly sat, but which Mons. Denon, who uncovered it, says belonged to some dog of a Mahomedan, who has left on it the inscription in Cufic characters, "There is but one God, and Mahomet is his prophet." Supposing the relic to be a true one, we may, adopting the cardinal's line of argument, assume that Peter chose for his chair a material which would become worm-eaten and rotten, to show how in like manner those who would claim to sit in that chair, would soon become changed and "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." But there is one point about this famous seat of which we may be perfectly sure, which is, that Peter never would have dreamed of calling it a throne, because it was an apostolic warning to all future presidents over Christian brethren, that they were not to be lords over God's heritage; and it is to the neglect of this warning we may trace all the changes in the original use and arrangement of churches, by which in the course of ages they ceased to be places of social worship, and became the palaces of prelates.

Chrysostom ridicules the idea of a bishop being other than a fallible man, and justly observes, that, occupying a more prominent position than other men, their virtues were more useful as examples, and their vices more dangerous as provocations to evil. Standing in this foremost rank, they were, in the days of persecution, the most conspicuous among the martyrs, and this naturally led to increased veneration for the office; a veneration which the bishops, who, in peaceful times, suc-